

# VA Puget Sound

## NEWS

Proudly Serving  
Veterans of the  
Northwest



VA Puget Sound Health Care System • American Lake & Seattle

Spring 2000

## *Bringing Health to the Community*

In the Puget Sound Region an innovative series of outreach clinics makes it possible to obtain health care screening close to home. This remarkable program that stretches from Bellingham, to La Push and Forks on the Olympic Peninsula, reaches under-served veterans across the region. Dependent solely on volunteers with health care and benefits expertise, the clinic draws on staff of the Regional Benefits office, the Washington Department of Veterans Affairs (WDVA), and VA Puget Sound. Staff volunteers travel with testing and exam equipment, vaccinations and laptop computers. Clinics are based on the community needs and are often held in the evening or Saturday.

Now in its fourth year, this innovative program is held in armories, aircraft hangars and churches. Those who volunteer find camaraderie, professional and personal rewards. Veterans of all ages find warmth, sincerity, and caring skilled health care practitioners. The Outreach Clinic offers screenings that include Hepatitis C, oral cancer, blood pressure, hearing and eye exams, immunizations, foot care, and programs in alcohol and domestic violence awareness.

L. G. Robinson at Olympia  
Armory Outreach Clinic

VA Puget Sound, Washington Department of Veterans Affairs, and US Army Reserves hold a continuing clinic the first Saturday of each month in Bellingham. Call (206) 764-2576 for information.

For employees wanting to volunteer at an outreach clinic: obtain supervisory approval; view the web site to select dates/times of availability; send one message per clinic time (via VISTA e-mail) to Steve Linen, Administrative Officer, for the Nurse Executive Office.

Outreach Clinic site: <http://152.131.135.160/departments/nursing/outreach.html>.



## *Comments from the CMO*

Change, complexity, compassion, caring, maybe some confusion...these are some of my impressions since I became the Chief Medical Officer 3 months ago. I



did not appreciate the enormous stream of information, the volume of many decisions and the deadlines, nor the value of a mission statement until I saw how useful one can be to help steer us through the mass of conflicting and confusing information and needs.

Complexity exists due to the nature of our patients' problems, the many options to providing care and the medications we can use and because of multiple tasks before us — patient care, research, teaching; affiliations with the University of Washington, the VISN and many other institutions outside of our walls.

Change (which paradoxically enough is now a constant) when mixed with complexity, often creates confusion. Yet we are adapting to this change - you need only look across the hall to find dedicated people. Because of our caring and compassion, together with some wisdom and intelligence we are learning to solve more and more of our own problems, a heady task that can energize us if we succeed. We need to continue to remind each other what it is that makes us excited to create change.

# Quality in Action

## Compliance Program Initiated

Q: What is a Compliance Program?

A: "Compliance" means observance of legal requirements that regulate health care facilities particularly with respect to medical charges and billing. Compliance Programs help identify potentially weak areas and develop solutions before outside investigators find these problems.

Q: How is this different from Quality Improvement/Risk Management programs?

A: Compliance is integral to a QI program but focuses specifically on documentation, coding and billing. Last fall, VA began billing for services under a "reasonable charges" similar to the private sector. Some insurance companies found occasions where the care was not adequately documented for billing purposes.

Billing without appropriate documentation can be construed as fraud and huge fines can be levied. As VA is under increasing pressure to collect more money from non-federal sources, we need to continuously improve these processes.

Q: But VA does not bill Medicare now. Why do we have to conform?

A: VA is being held to the same standards as the private sector for documentation. Regardless of reasonable charges or Medicare financial support, VA will comply with Health Care Finance and Administration (HCFA) requirements because "it's the right thing to do."

Q: What is VA doing and what is the plan for VA Puget Sound?

A: VA Headquarters has established a

compliance office; the 22 VISNs have appointed compliance officers and committees. Training is being developed and tracking systems are being put into place. VA Puget Sound will focus on achieving complete, accurate and timely documentation of patient care. That is the basis for multiple improvements.

Q: What are the next steps?

A: Providers will concentrate on documenting care as soon as it is given. This will facilitate easier implementation and tracking. Education and training will be rolled out to different groups. Measurement systems and reporting systems will be put into place after that.

Questions may be directed to Fred Fiscella, Compliance Officer, at (206) 764-2115.

## ICU Nurses Improve Care

When intravenous antibiotics are prescribed, health care practitioners believe that the dose received by the patient will be therapeutic. Thanks to Melissa Hutchinson and Randy Eveland, two nurses from the Surgical Intensive Care Unit (SICU), this is now true. Having developed an "antibiotic flush system" which ensures that all of the antibiotic fluid in the bag is used (without leaving any of the precious drugs in the delivery tubing), Melissa and Randy found that without this system, as much as 10 to 46 percent of the drug dose remained in the tubing as "residual." Because tubings are changed frequently, a significant amount of the prescribed antibiotic was being lost.

To control infection and to reduce the possibility of fungal, viral or bacterial mutations, experts say that 95 percent of each prescribed dose of antibiotic needs to be delivered. This new flush system is not only effective in delivering the required medication, but has demonstrated significant cost-savings by reducing the number of tubing sets that are used. In addition, it provides cost savings by using less expensive components and allowing the same tubing to be utilized for multiple antibiotic infusions, without the risk of drug-drug interactions. The preliminary study completed by Melissa and Randy demonstrates a 63 percent savings per patient over the previously used system. This new method has been reviewed and approved by the Nursing Clinical Practice Committee and has resulted in ongoing training in its use throughout VA Puget Sound.



Melissa Hutchinson and Randy Eveland

## VA Research Targets Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C (HCV) damages the liver and can be spread by needle sharing and by sexual transmission. Often times the source of infection is unknown. An estimated 3 million Americans harbor the organism. Because symptoms of liver disease may take as long as 30 years to develop, exact numbers are unknown and is why doctors consider hepatitis C a "hidden epidemic." HCV can also damage kidneys, nerves, blood vessels and certain immune system cells.

Preliminary studies suggest that hepatitis C is much more common among our nation's veterans than in the general population because of some of the health risk factors. More than half of VA liver transplant patients have hepatitis C. Researchers also suspect that there is a link between hepatitis B or C and liver cancer as rates have increased over the past 20 years. A new vaccine is helping to slow infection rates for hepatitis B, but none exists for HCV.

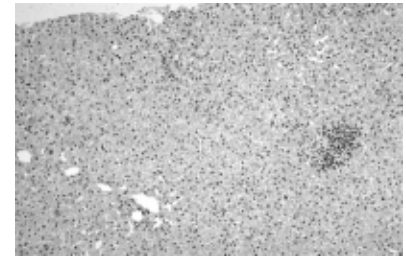
Currently, more than 100 individual research projects on HCV at VA Medical Centers across the country range in focus from basic mechanisms of the disease to prevention to new treatment strategies.

Some of VA's research efforts against hepatitis C include:

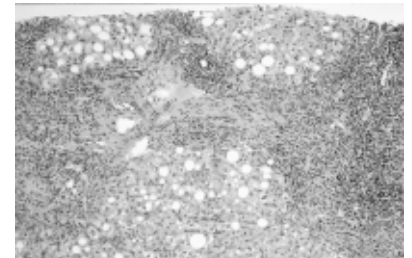
- Clinical trials that look at various formulations of drugs to evaluate potential new therapies.
- Development of a sensitive test to detect HCV in persons who have no currently detectable symptoms.
- Development of a vaccine that can prevent HCV infection.

Currently, VA researchers are determining the prevalence of HCV infection in a representative sample of veterans across the country and assessing risk factors for HCV infection. Ultimately, these studies will help to identify patients at risk for serious liver

disease and appropriate treatment therapies. Find additional information about HCV on the web at <http://www.Puget-Sound.med.va.gov>



Beginning stage of Hepatitis C



Advanced stage of Hepatitis C

## Volunteers Needed for Shingles Prevention Study

If you are over 60 and had chickenpox as a child, you are in the group most likely to get shingles—a miserably painful skin and nerve infection. A nationwide Veterans Affairs study, however, is now under way to determine whether an investigational vaccine may prevent shingles and its debilitating complications.

Dr. Kathleen Neuzil and her colleagues at the VA Puget Sound Health Care System are seeking 1,800

local participants, both veterans and non-veterans, who are over 60 and never had shingles.

Previous research has suggested that boosting immunity to the varicella-zoster virus might help prevent shingles. The new test vaccine is a stronger version of the one now used to prevent chickenpox in children.

For more information, call 206-768-5421 or toll free 1-877-768-5422.

VA Puget Sound

*Research Week*  
April 18 to 21, 2000

Seattle and American Lake

Presentations:

4-18-00

John Stratton, MD

Ken Lehman, MD

'The Aging Heart'

Steve Hunt, MD

'Health Concerns of Gulf War Veterans'

Elaine Peskind, MD

'Brain Stress Hormones and Alzheimer's Disease - Implications for Behavioral Problems'

4-19-00

George Merriam, MD

TBA

4-21-00

Gayle Reiber, PhD

'A Success Story: Care of Lower Limb Amputees in the VA'

Robert Vessella, PhD

'Research and Models of Prostate Cancer'



# In the NEWS

## *One VA* *In Washington State*

One VA is a new program designed to integrate and disseminate information on services available to veterans. The Washington State One VA leadership board includes representatives from the Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, Vet Centers, National Cemetery Administration, service organizations, and the Washington State Department of Veterans Affairs. The Board's strategic plan emphasizes a One VA culture among those who serve veterans. Also under development is a Washington-specific new employee orientation segment on this concept.

A second interagency group, the One VA Design and Action Council, will work on implementing additional strategic goals and objectives to achieve a One VA mindset. For example, a newly designed resource packet will contain information to increase staff knowledge of available benefits and services as well as how to access them. A list of helpful videos and websites, brochures from various agencies, contact persons, and other resources is included. In addition, frequently asked questions and corresponding answers will be distributed among staff. The resource packet aims to better prepare those serving veterans to answer veterans' questions and to provide responsive, seamless service every day. Future efforts of both groups to cultivate a One VA approach will include increasing staff knowledge and awareness of veterans and their experiences.

## *CIO Receives Commendation*

Timothy B. Williams, CEO, VA Puget Sound Health Care System and the Northern Alliance, recently received a Commendation from the Network Director, Ted Galey, MD, for his role as VISN 20 Chief Information Officer (CIO) from 1996-2000. Under Williams' leadership, an enhanced telecommunications infrastructure was implemented, (telemedicine programs, the Computerized Patient Record System (CPRS), and the Consumer Health Information and Performance Sets (CHIPS)). These innovative models have received national attention.

## *Hammer Awards*

Roger French, Executive Director of Human Resources Management and Don Kelly, Personnel Management Specialist, are recipients of the Hammer Award for their involvement with the Welfare to Work Program. This program helps move long-term welfare recipients into gainful employment by helping them acquire the skills, work experience and resources they need to find and keep unsubsidized employment. The Hammer Award was originated by Vice President Gore to recognize employees efforts for reducing costs or making government operations more efficient.

## *N o r t h w e s t Federal Credit Union*

Opening Late April, 2000



NW Federal Credit Union (NWFCU) is pleased to announce the opening of a new VA Medical Center branch in Seattle. The new facility will open in late April and provide a range of financial services including a drive through teller and ATM. You can find NWFCU in building 35 (near the main entrance of the Seattle campus). Your new branch manager, Paul McJannet, and Assistant Branch Manager, Susan Heerlyn, look forward to serving you.

## *Thomas A. March, MD* *Former Director at American Lake Passes*

Dr. Thomas March, aged 96, died peacefully at his Gravelly Lake Home on February 29th. He entered the US Army Air Force Medical Corps in 1942, becoming a flight and group surgeon for the 8<sup>th</sup> Air Force Squadron based in England. From Capt. to Lt. Col., Dr. March continued to serve his country in the Air Force Reserves until 1953. He joined the VA Department of Medicine in Pittsburgh, PA in 1947. During his VA career, he served as the Director of the VA Hospital at Bedford, MA; as the Deputy Director of Psychiatry, Neurology and Psychology at the VA Hospital in Washington, DC; and as the Director of the VA Hospital at American Lake, WA, where he retired in 1973.

# Veterans

O u r f a m i l y , O u r f r i e n d s



Robin Cook and Erick Waldmann

A cold, drizzly winter day did not deter the 300-plus veterans who attended the recent VA Outreach Clinic at the National Guard Armory in Olympia. Many came for the medical and dental screening. Some came for follow-up of medical complaints; and a large number checked in with the VA Regional Office Service Officers to determine eligibility status for VA home loans, compensation and pension claims, and education opportunities. Not surprising, attendees said that convenience of location and hours were the reasons they turned out. We spoke with several veterans while they waited.

Erick Waldmann, 46, is a Colorado native who spent much of his 20-year career in the Air Force working on main-frame computers. Waldmann is now pursuing a second career in food service management. When he joined the Air Force in the 70's, financial security was a major consideration for him and his young family, and

the Air Force provided that. Waldmann attended the Outreach Clinic to follow up on a couple of medical conditions that otherwise would have cost him a day's pay to go to either American Lake or Seattle division.

Pearl Turner-Pugh and her husband, Julian Pugh, are both in their early 40's and retired from the Army. Besides stopping by several of the outreach screening stations, they were part of a long line of veterans waiting to speak with Regional Office Service Officers. Remaining education eligibility was one of their primary interests. Both had completed their undergraduate education while serving in the Army and they are pursuing additional education. Turner-Pugh has since completed a master's degree and is working on a doctorate in educational psychology. Pugh's case of wanderlust as a teenager in Jacksonville, Florida, led him to the Army to satisfy the travel bug. He worked in field artillery for most of his career and now works for the US Post Office.

All in all, the Outreach Clinic was a welcomed event for south Sound veterans and brought new veterans into the family of patients who seek their care at VA Puget Sound Health Care System.



Julian Pugh and Pearl Turner-Pugh

# Year 2000 Federal Savings Bond C a m p a i g n

The Year 2000 Federal Savings Bond Campaign is underway. This is the first time that bond transactions may be handled through HR LINK\$.

For more information call Marlene Grantham, Chairperson of this year's Campaign at (253) 582-8440, ext 6000, and Chandra Haley, Co-Chairperson at (206) 764-2635.

# A w a l k d o w n Memory Lane



Walt  
Eisenreich



Marty  
Blackburn

VA Puget Sound Health Care System's 2000 Volunteer Recognition program will honor 549 volunteers May 13, 2000, at the Fife Executive Inn. VA Puget Sound executive leadership and staff will highlight key periods of the past century. Featured volunteers include Walt Eisenreich, Seattle Division, Escort Service volunteer with 18 years and over 25,000 volunteer hours, and Marty Blackburn, American Lake Division, Golf Course

Manager, celebrating his 21<sup>st</sup> year and 32,500 hours of volunteer service. The event is planned by VA "choreographer," Sandy Blanz, Voluntary Service Specialist. For more information contact (206) 764-2195 or (253) 582-8440, Ext: 76754.

# 12<sup>th</sup> a n n u a l Veteran's Art competition

This year's Veterans Art Competition held March 10, 2000 at the American Lake Division had over 65 entries. Two of the 26 local winners: F.B. Crow, a veteran of the Army Air Corps and the Air Force, in the Special Recognition category for *Calm in Pink*, and Ed Orr, a Navy veteran of three tours of duty in Vietnam, winner in the Special Commemorative category for *Grenadier*. The Special Commemorative category this year is specifically for veterans who served in Viet Nam.

First place winners will be eligible to participate in the National Veterans Creative Arts Festival held October 15-22, 2000, in Washington, DC. Involvement in the festival is made possible by donations from Veterans Service Organizations from both divisions. For more information contact Vicki Booth at (253) 582-8440, Ext. 76198.

## Important Contacts for Veterans

New Patient Advocates:  
Carolyn Batson  
Gladys Longosky  
(206) 764-2160 or (253)  
582-8440 ext. 4147

Minority Veterans  
Coordinator:  
Denise Grant  
(206) 768-5363 or (253)  
582-8440 ext. 4147

Women Veterans  
Coordinator:  
Georgia Vitense  
(206) 764-2441

## Veteran's Web Survival Kit

POW/MIA Resource Guide  
<http://members.aol.com/usaheroes/warlib26.htm>

Veterans News and Information Service  
<http://www.vnis.com>

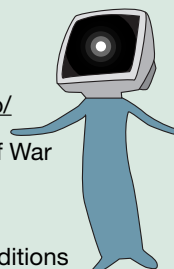
POW Network  
<http://www.asde.com/~pownet>

Vietnam Era POW/MIA Data Base  
<http://lcweb2.loc.gov/pow/powhome.html>

Defense Prisoner of War/  
Missing Personnel Office  
<http://www.dtic.mil/dpmo/>

American Ex-Prisoners of War  
Organization Website  
<http://www.ex-pow.org>

Physical and Mental Conditions  
<http://www.drkeep.com>



## VA Puget Sound NEWS

VA Puget Sound News is published quarterly, each autumn, winter, spring and summer by the Office of Public Affairs. VA Puget Sound Health Care System proudly serves veterans throughout the Northwest with facilities located in Seattle and at American Lake. VA Puget Sound is part of the VISN 20 network of health care facilities.

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Comments or future story ideas may be submitted to the VA Puget Sound News Editorial Board via VISTA at: g.NEWSLETTER or via Outlook to Jeri Rowe and Lin Hoisington. All photos for newsletter inclusion must be taken or approved by the Editorial Board.



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